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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4153
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1609
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3335
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6738
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4353
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0742
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0743
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0391
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2674
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000679

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [BM](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: UN U/SG GAMBARI VISIT SURPASSES EXPECTATIONS

REF: A. A) RANGOON 669

[1](#)B. B) RANGOON 648

[1](#)C. C) USUN 775

[1](#)D. D) RANGOON 171

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Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: UN Under Secretary General Ibrahim Gambari visited Burma May 18-20. He did manage to see Aung San Suu Kyi for 45 minutes, although no one had expected it. He also visited the senior generals in their new capital and heard promises of greater openness. Gambari downplayed the significance of his meetings saying that the willingness of the GOB to provide greater access for humanitarian assistance, arrange a more inclusive political process, and release more political prisoners remains to be tested. He also called for the suspension of military action against the Karen, but only received complaints from the generals about the Karen in return. We should work with other interested countries to keep pushing for major substantive reforms and support UN efforts to find common ground between the regime and its pro-democracy opponents. End Summary

[1](#)2. (C) Charge attended UN U/SG Gambari's detailed briefing for diplomats of his three days of meetings in Burma on Saturday, May 20 shortly before he departed Rangoon. He was accompanied by the UN Director of the Asia Pacific Division Michael Williams and the Deputy Director Beng Yong Chew. UNDP Resrep Charles Petrie also participated in most of the meetings. Gambari noted that Kofi Annan had sent him, that it had been a judgment call, but that various people with whom he had consulted, including Amb. Bolton, had agreed that he should come. He said that he came under the "good offices" role of the Secretary General, and his visit was "not about sanctions or threats."

13. (C) Gambari planned to return to New York to report his findings to the Secretary General, members of ASEAN and the Informal Consultative Group on Myanmar (ICGM--see ref C). He noted that he consciously had "piggybacked" on ASEAN's efforts to push for reform, noting he met with Bilahari Kausikan in Singapore immediately before arriving in Rangoon. Asked if a special envoy would be appointed soon, Gambari replied that this must be thought through carefully to find someone who would be allowed to come regularly to Burma and meet with all the relevant parties.

14. (SBU) Gambari began by listing his meetings over the course of his visit:
--May 18, he met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Planning, and Science, Technology and Labor.
--May 19, he met with the USDA, which he professed surprise to learn was not the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but a political party (Note: organized by the regime. End note), the Minister of Agriculture, who also chairs the USDA, the Myanmar Women's Federation, and separately with leaders of the National Unity Party (all but defunct successor party to a previous government-organized party) and the National League for Democracy (NLD--see ref A).
--May 20, he traveled to the new capital and met with SPDC Chairman Than Shwe, Vice Chairman Maung Aye, Prime Minister Soe Win, Secretary-1 Thein Sein, Chief of Staff Thura Shwe Mann. Gambari then had a private meeting with the Than Shwe and Maung Aye for one hour, while his staff met with the other generals. He returned to Rangoon and met with Aung San Suu Kyi (he had not been told in advance that it would happen, and reportedly she only learned of the meeting at noon that day).

What Gambari Sought and What He Got

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15. (C) Gambari decribed the purposes of his visit as follows:
--to see for himself the situation in Burma;
--to establish contacts with the government to permit better communication with the UN;
--to open doors and permit greater access for UN agencies;
--to relay the concern of the international community about the pace of democratization and human rights.

16. (C) Humanitarian Access: Gambari said he got the agreement of the GOB to discuss the proposed guidelines with the UN agencies to ensure that they facilitate access (see Ref D). Petrie added that during the separate meeting he and the other UN officials had with the other generals, he explained in "extensive detail" the difficulties with the proposed guidelines. During subsequent questioning, Gambari added that he believed that this greater access would be extended to the international community more broadly, but cautioned that it may take weeks or months. He claimed the generals have given "clear instructions" to discuss and negotiate the guidelines, so now the ball was "in our court" to test this commitment.

17. (C) UN Next Steps: The UN country team planned to meet this week to develop a plan of action on guidelines and access, and Charles Petrie huddled with the British Ambassador to discuss moving forward on the Three Disease Fund as well. Gambari described ASSK as confident in the UN, but believing that the UN needs to listen more to the people and not let the USDA determine where assistance goes. She asked the UN to facilitate the "voice of the people."

18. (C) Political Issues: Gambari raised the issue of a all inclusive democratization plan. The generals described the National Convention process, and indicated some willingness to include the NLD and other political parties. Gambari cautioned that this will take time, offered the UN as a facilitator, but concluded that he felt progress had been achieved "in exploring common ground" so that NLD could join

the National Convention. The generals claimed the National Convention deliberations would resume in October with a possibility of concluding by 2008 or 2009. Gambari added that a "more inclusive outcome" would be more likely to endure than a speedy conclusion.

¶9. (C) Karen: Gambari appealed for a suspension of military action against the Karen to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Karen people. He also recommended dialogue between the GOB and the Karen. The regime did not offer much beyond inviting Gambari to see the situation for himself in Karen state. The generals mostly complained about violence they blamed on the Karen people.

¶10. (C) Detained Persons: Gambari said that the GOB committed to releasing "some more of those prisoners who won't compromise national security," which gave Gambari the sense that the authorities want to work with the UN. However, when questioned by Charge afterwards if the releases might include ASSK, he expressed doubt she would be freed in the near future.

¶11. (C) ASSK: Gambari described ASSK as mentally and physically well, very articulate and well-informed saying she listens to four hour of news broadcasts a day. Gambari called her a "patriot" who was "ready for a serious discussion with the authorities." She raised a number of issues, which confirmed to Gambari that the Secretary General might be able to offer guidance to all the parties on "common ground." Privately, Gambari told Charge that ASSK had complained about the reduced number of visits from her doctor (see ref B) and her worries about the health of one of her maids.

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¶12. (C) General Atmospherics: Gambari modestly admitted that he could not resolve all problems in a two day visit, nor could he say yet whether it was a success, but the visit went beyond his expectations. While the GOB has shown a willingness to engage, he said "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," and the "UN will test the full extent of the willingness. He had the opportunity to deliver messages directly to the highest level, and now will test the generals' commitment in following up. During questioning, he described the conversations with the generals as businesslike. Than Shwe outlined the challenges he faced, particularly along the borders with five countries, and described his history in the armed forces. Gambari concluded that the generals appear to want to reengage with the international community and understand that "some compromises need to be made." Why now? Perhaps, Gambari speculated, the generals had decided it was time to send different signals to head off UN Security Council discussions of Burma, to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA), and to attract Foreign Direct Investment. Gambari repeatedly emphasized the need to keep testing and pushing the generals saying we "cannot let the momentum slip."

Reactions

¶13. (C) Most of the Ambassadors who attended the briefing have been here long enough to understand that periods of hope in Burma are often followed by longer periods of despair. That the generals finally agreed to permit Gambari to meet with ASSK was seen by most as an encouraging sign. Interestingly, Gambari had not received permission to visit the UN offices on his first day, so he just went ahead without permission. The Japanese Ambassador, not surprisingly, seemed most eager to move forward on ODA based on the briefing. The British Ambassador expressed regret that she would be leaving now that the first ray of hope had appeared after a year of discouraging news. The NLD Central Executive Committee members characterized their own meeting, as well as that of ASSK, with Gambari as productive,

specifically in searching for a common ground for discussions with the regime. They appreciated Gambari was in a "fact finding" mode, and felt comfortable in discussing the current situation with him, knowing that their comments were likely recorded. NLD Secretary U Lwin summed up the reaction as "slowly, slowly we have a way to go to our target."

Comment

¶14. (C) Gambari must have impressed the generals, since he did end up seeing ASSK, which no one including himself expected. The fact that they were willing to spend over an hour talking with him is also notable, since Than Shwe cut short his meeting with the Indonesian President after ten minutes and refused to even meet the ASEAN envoy, Malaysian Foreign Minister Hamid. AT the same time, they tightly controlled his movements, basically bringing everyone to Gambari rather than letting him travel around freely even in Rangoon. Gambari appeared to understand the situation here sufficiently to recognize that the few positive signals he received during this visit ultimately requires major substantive changes in a number of areas.

¶15. (C) Gambari should be commended for his efforts and encouraged to stay engaged. We should support UN efforts to find some common ground between the regime and its political opponents, so they begin talking to each other directly. We should continue to work with interested countries to make sure that a genuinely inclusive political dialogue, if based on the National Convention, would permit real debate and public discussion as well as more representative

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participation. The new Three Disease Fund, being set up by the Europeans, offers to the best chance to test how much access will be provided to humanitarian assistance. And we must continue to push for release of all political prisoners and the cessation of all hostile action against unarmed ethnic minorities, to include forced relocations, forced labor, and rapes. For instance, Aung San Suu Kyi's current detention order expires May 27; releasing her would be a much more powerful statement of willingness to engage than permitting a 45 minute meeting with her. Change that gives more lasting hope to the Burmese people must go far beyond the symbolic.

VILLAROSA